

# 4<sup>th</sup> Brief:

## The 5th Population and Housing Census 2025 Lao PDR

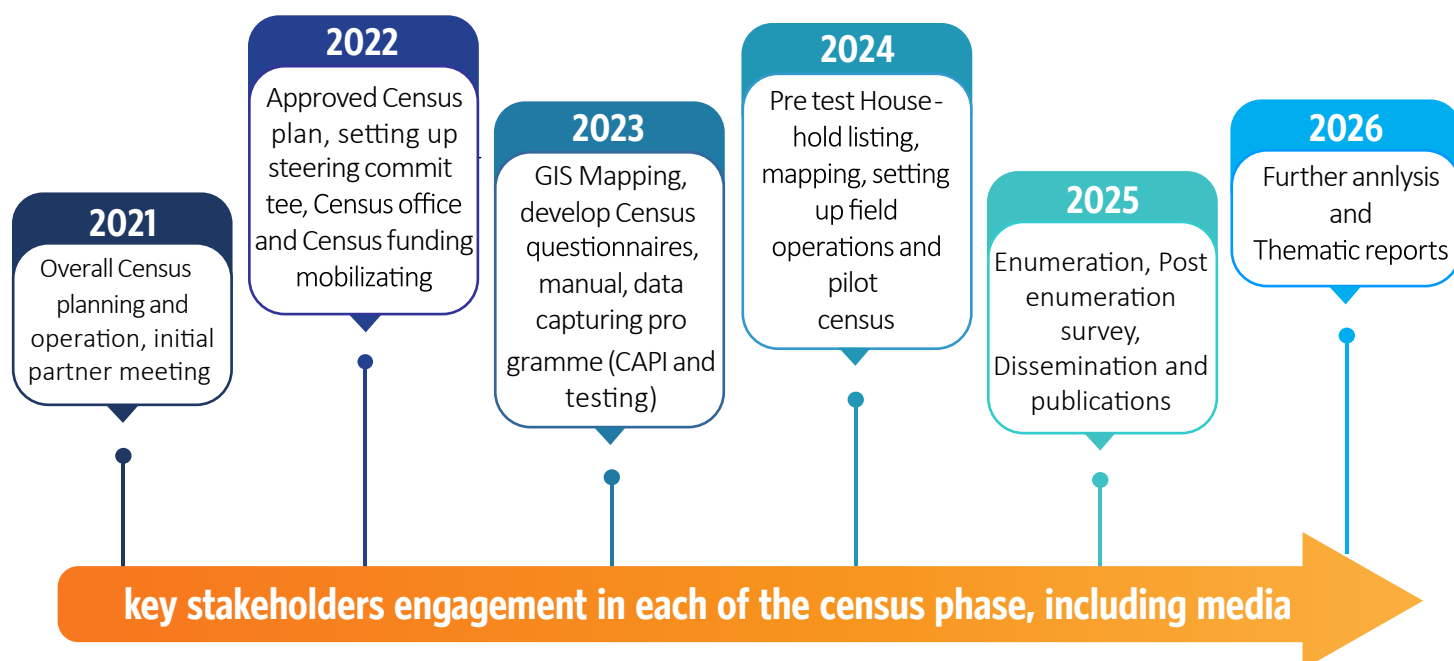
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### "Counting Everyone, Because Everyone Counts"

The 5th Population and Housing Census (PHC) of Lao PDR is scheduled for March 2025. The PHC is amongst the government's largest and most complex operations, requiring significant preparation. As such, the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment, in close collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and key development partners, have been preparing for the upcoming census since 2021. The PHC, as a key source of population data for national and sub-national planning and decision-making, plays an integral part in formulation of the national development plan as well as the humanitarian contingency planning and responses. The 5th PHC 2025 aims to continue tracking population changes and updating information on progress towards implementation of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2021-2025, formulation of the 10th NSED 2026-2030, as well as achievements of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (ICPD PoA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, the census requires effective preparation in terms of human resources, technologies, budget and logistics.

Importantly, the 5th PHC 2025 will be notable as the country's first-ever digital census. An estimated 13,151 enumerators will collect data from approximately 1.4 million households in 18 provinces, within a three-week period in March 2025 via handheld devices (tablets), and using Geographic Information System (GIS)-based maps and cartography.

# 2025 PHC Roadmap



This 4th Census Brief, produced by the LSB and UNFPA, provides readers with an overview of census preparation. As per the Road Map for PHC 2025, pictured above, the main activities in 2023 and 2024 are centered around developing census instruments, such as the questionnaire, the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) application, manuals, data capturing and data transmission systems, GIS action plan and field work, quality assurance strategy, as well as preparation for field tests and the main pilot census. The following sub-sections outlines the progress toward the preparation for the 2025 PHC:

## 1 Census questionnaire takes shape

- At the start of 2023, a first draft questionnaire was developed with support from technical experts and through a consultative process. Several rounds of consultation meetings with census users, including line ministries, mass organizations, development partners and organizations of people with disabilities were held and recommendations obtained. This will ensure the 2025 PHC questionnaire is inclusive and responsive to the needs and priorities of the country.
- The questionnaire was adapted based on consultations with census users, and in line with the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (revision 3). Several country-specific new questions were suggested for use in the census to identify the completeness of the administrative registration system, including questions on family books, birth, death, marriage and divorce registration documents.
- As a result of a technical workshop in August 2023 organized by UNFPA and UNHCR, a set of questions on statelessness were incorporated into the census questionnaire to identify statelessness, and to ensure that persons of undetermined nationality are counted in the census, and mainstreamed into national development planning and service delivery programmes.
- LSB, in collaboration with UNFPA and in partnership with USAID, Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and Humanity Inclusion, held a stakeholder meeting on August 22 to improve disability data in the upcoming census. Organizations of people with disabilities, civil society organizations, development partners and United Nations agencies discussed opportunities and challenges regarding data collection on disabilities and brainstormed practical solutions to improve the quality of disability data. A short set of Washington Group

questinos has already been included in the census questionnaire, and LSB will work to raise the awareness of enumerators on disability-related issues and conduct publicity campaigns at community level to encourage households to share information with enumerators.

- The draft questionnaire of the 2025 PHC includes eight modules and nearly 140 questions. The following table provides a brief overview of the modules and key items of the questionnaire.

Modules	Key items
ID: Identification Information	Province, district, village, enumeration area, place of residence, GPS coordinates
A: Building and Dwelling	Type of building, building materials (wall, roof, floor), occupancy status, number of households in building
B: Households and Dwelling	Electricity, source energy for cooking, drinking water, travel time to water source, type of toilet, number of rooms, type of tenureship, household amenities, possession vehicle, number of household members, total area, total number of rooms
C: Household List	Sex at birth, date of birth/age, relationship to head of household
D: Individual Information	Marital status/living arrangements, country of citizenship/statelessness, ethnic group, religion, functional difficulties (WGQ), literacy/education attainment, school attendance, economic activities/ employment/ unemployment/ economically inactive, place of birth, place of previous residence (migration), reason for moving, age at first birth, survival status of children, information about last child, civil registration documents (birth, death, marriage, divorce certificates)
E: Mortality	Number of deaths in household (12 months), sex of deceased, age at death, delivering at time of age, child death, mother of deceased child, pregnancy at time of age, post-natal death
F: Former household members	Former household members living abroad (international migration), sex, age, current place of residence, reason and time of moving
G: Visitor	Sex, age, place of residence
H: End	Possession and number of family books in the household

## 2 The CAPI application is developing and fine tuning

- The benefits of digitizing data collection and using handheld devices (tablets) reducing costs, saving time, controlling over quality of data, flexibility in the collection process, faster data transmission, backup and safe storage, and quicker access to analytics.
- The first version of the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) application using CSPro software<sup>1</sup> was developed through extensive technical support from UNFPA and international experts. It is intended that GIS maps will be an integral part of the CAPI application in the newer version in 2024.
- With overall technical guidance provided by UNFPA and international experts, LSB staff extensively tested the first version of the CAPI application in-house. As with any application, bugs were removed, and changes made to ensure the application was user-friendly and accurate.
- The questionnaire was translated into Lao language, with Lao questions incorporated into the application.

<sup>1</sup>CSPro, short for the Census and Survey Processing System, is a public domain data processing software package developed by the U.S. Census Bureau and ICF International. This software package is widely used for data entry, editing, tabulation, and dissemination of census and survey data.

### 3 Quality assurance and control kicks in gear

- During an integrated mission of the census international technical team (IT and Quality assurance) in September 2023, training was held on census quality assurance and risk management. Technical assistance was provided to LSB senior experts to construct risk registers, and set up Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and a quality assurance framework (QAF).
- Quality assurance consultant conducted training on the Post-Enumeration Survey (PES) to LSB technical team, explaining the PES methodology, to measure the accuracy of the census by independently surveying a sample of the population.
- As part of capacity building activities on digital census, preparations were made for a study tour of senior LSB census management and experts to the Philippines. During the study visit on 4-6th December 2023, Philippines Statistics Authority (PSA) shared knowledge, experiences and lessons learned from census implementation including pre-enumeration, enumeration and post-enumeration activities.
- With population projections a key output of the census, the LSB is planning to renew population projections based on PHC 2025 data. To realize this goal and strengthen LSB capacity on use of census data for population projections, two senior experts from the LSB and Ministry of Planning and Investment attended a regional workshop on population projections jointly organized by UNFPA, UNDESA and US Census Bureau in October 2023. The workshop aimed to build capacity to increase the availability and quality of population projections, including sub-national projections, to make them more relevant to census users' needs.

### 4 Census GIS mapping and cartography is on progress

- The GIS technical team provided technical support to LSB in establishing statistical-geospatial information infrastructure for official statistics in preparation for PHC 2025. This is in line with a plan to develop a census geodatabase at building and housing unit levels, with the possibility to geocode units (housing units, households, individuals) with precise locations and addresses at the time of census.
- The GIS detailed action plan was developed in early 2023, through technical support facilitated by UNFPA, and includes a list of activities and tasks organized according to a monthly timeframe for the pre-enumeration, enumeration, and post-enumeration phases. This includes acquisition of geospatial data and tools, development of a geospatial infrastructure, acquisition of high-resolution satellite images for main built-up areas, definition of census geography and geodatabase, development of computer applications for field mapping activities and testing using the ESRI modernization package and ArcGIS software, implementation of field mapping activities at building and dwelling levels, and delineation of Census Enumeration Areas (EAs).
- The census must be undertaken through strictly sequenced and interlinked interventions. Any delay in an intervention has a knock-on effect on subsequent ones. Timely preparation of GIS mapping is crucial for timely implementation of census pilot and enumeration phases. The mapping activities require nearly a year's field activities from October 2023 to identify and classify buildings and housing units involving 200 field teams and 40 office supervisors. The Preparations for this fieldwork have yet to start and need to be expedited by LSB.
- Acquisition of satellite images is in process, but delays mean urgent action is required to procure images, and start fieldwork preparation.
- LSB will make use of the ESRI Modernization Programme for Official Statistics. The license of the ESRI package was procured by UNFPA, and LSB can use the software for four years.

## 5 First field test of census questionnaire and CAPI application is realized

- During September, 27 and 28, 2023 a first field test of the census questionnaire was conducted with technical support from UNFPA. Within two days, dwellings in urban and rural settlements in Vientiane Capital were visited. UNFPA and technical experts observed the field test. A total of 68 dwellings were visited, and information gathered from 266 persons. A subsequent evaluation will see the questionnaire and CAPI application adapted accordingly. It was concluded that the CAPI application was effective, integrating essential features for data accuracy and efficiency. User feedback and real-world testing will result in continuous improvements, enhancing the questionnaire's usability and reliability.
- Preparing a revised and updated version of the questionnaire is recommended based on findings and feedback from the first field tests. This new questionnaire version will address any identified issues and incorporate necessary changes. A revised and updated version of the questionnaire and CAPI applications in Lao language will be produced tentatively by the end of 2023.

## 6 Census budget and funding gap in focus





- The 2025 PHC budget estimates vary from US\$19.9 million to US\$22.2 million depending on use of different hand-held devices, and duration of the enumeration period. The census budget can vary throughout the census process and, if necessary, be adapted. For instance, transport costs may change, the dollar exchange rate may vary, or activities may be adapted.
- More than US\$5 million has already been secured by UNFPA, USAID and the World Bank to cover the costs of technical assistance, GIS mapping activities and software.
- Additional financial support amounting to US\$ 1.77 million from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of the Government of Australia will be available in 2024 to cover the costs of technical assistance needed for field tests, genderizing and communication strategies as well as partially supporting the pilot census in 2024.
- The Government of Laos aims to fund nearly 25 percent of the total census budget equivalent to US\$ 5.4 million, however, the current economic challenges facing Lao PDR have affected the financing of development projects in general, including those focused on statistical improvements, including preparation and operation of the PHC. A funding gap of nearly US\$ 8.07 million (as per the census estimates above) for 2025 PHC requires immediate attention of key regional and global donors to deliver financial, technical and/or in-kind assistance. As such, this funding gap must be filled urgently to enable LSB to cover the costs of procurement of nearly 13,100 handheld devices, IT infrastructure for data collections, training of supervisors and enumerators, DSA costs for census enumerators and logistics, vehicles and the Post-Enumeration Survey (PES).





## 7 Next Steps





- As preparations for PHC 2025 gain momentum, the following steps are expected to be taken during the first phase of 2024
- UNFPA will approach potential donors, and continue to advocate for mobilization of international resources for the census to ensure its timely and quality implementation as well as availability of census data for development planning in Lao PDR. UNFPA will use the opportunity of the National Conference on Population and Development in 2023 as well as other forums to advocate for census funding from a wide range of donors and development partners.





- After completion of the questionnaire for private households, the questionnaire for institutional households will be made, as well as the manuals for enumerators and supervisors. All census instruments will be available in early 2024.
- Before the main pilot census in mid-2024, several field tests will be implemented to ensure quality and accuracy of census tools and procedures. The editing protocol, and a draft of the editing programme using CSPro software will be developed and finalized before the pilot census.
- The GIS fieldwork will begin in March 2024. Maps for enumeration areas for the pilot census will be delineated. To do so, an application to gather field data for mapping should be developed and tested. GIS field workers will need training and field tests.
- Two rounds of field tests of the census questionnaire and CAPI application will be made in early 2024, to prepare for fieldwork activities of the pilot census in mid 2024.
- The census' Gender Strategy, and the Communication and Publicity Strategy will be developed and finalized before the pilot census in 2024.



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